

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 312 610

CS 009 820

AUTHOR DeGrella, Jeanne Berthelot
TITLE Creating a Literate Classroom Environment.
PUB DATE 89
NOTE 19p.
PUB TYPE Guides - Classroom Use - Guides (For Teachers) (052)
-- Information Analyses (070)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Class Activities; Classroom Design; *Classroom Environment; *Classroom Techniques; Elementary Education; Language Arts; *Literacy; Reading Writing Relationship; Teacher Role; Teaching Methods
IDENTIFIERS Whole Language Approach

ABSTRACT

A literate classroom environment immerses a student in a rich, stimulating, interactive, and purposeful print and language environment which is designed to provide for success in reading, writing, listening, and speaking and the needs of individuals responsible for their own learning in a natural, non-competitive, non-threatening, risk-taking setting. According to researchers, suggestions for teachers to aid in creating a literate classroom environment include: (1) the arrangement of the physical environment; (2) the incorporation of literacy activities such as reading quality literature, sharing books, sustained silent reading, and modeled writing; and (3) procedures to meet individual student needs. (Eighteen references are attached.) (RS)

* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *

ED312610

Literate Environment

1

Creating a Literate
Classroom Environment
Jeanne Berthelot DeGrella
University of Nevada, Las Vegas

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS
MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Jeanne B. DeGrella

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES
INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

Running Head: LITERATE ENVIRONMENT

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

2

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION
CENTER (ERIC)

☐ This document has been reproduced as
received from the person or organization
originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve
reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this docu-
ment do not necessarily represent official
OERI position or policy.

05009820

Creating a Literate Classroom Environment

Several teachers, sitting around the table, are talking about "their" children. One wondered if there is anything teachers can really do to make a difference in the life of a child, that child from a home where there is little time, attention, or help available. This is the one who always seems to be behind before getting starting. Some of us believe that implementing a literate classroom environment will make a difference in the learning of children.

Teale (1978) reviewed research about early readers to determine common factors of their background. His findings are: (1) there are obtainable and various print materials, including books and functional print, in the environment; (2) reading occurs in context of the environment; (3) paper and pencil are accessible; and (4) those in the environment respond to the child's actions and needs. Teale implies that establishing such a classroom environment is important. However, he cautions that it is not the only item that contributes to early reading. Many siblings of early readers,

raised in the same environment, do not become early readers.

Continuing with this review as a basis and beginning point, it now seems to be appropriate to define literate environment. Not finding a definition in the literature or research, it was time to return to the dictionary, a familiar resource.

Literate Environment Definition

Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary defines literate as being instructed in letters, specifically able to read and write and/or pertaining to or learned in literature. Environment consists of all outside conditions and influences which affect the life and development of an organism. Thus, a literal definition of literate environment would be all factors in the classroom which affect the student's development in reading and writing through literature. When educators, as in Tempe, Arizona, refer to the topic, more is inferred. Tempe students are immersed in a print-filled environment that is purposefully planned to provide for success and needs of individuals,

placing responsibility for learning on the child (Tempe, 1988). The philosophy states that the environment is established according to Cambourne's conditions of learning. It is created for the learning of reading through language, writing, and reading.

In addition to being immersed in this described environment, Holdaway (1979, 1980) says that the functions and skill of print must be used in purposeful ways. If they are to entertain, that is what they should do. If they are to be used for information, then that should be clearly and truthfully given. Each needs to make sense in the real world. This is further supported by the Commission on Reading's report Becoming a Nation of Readers (Anderson, Hiebert, Scott, & Wilkinson, 1985). Children need to be taught in situations where written language is used to entertain (books), to inform (package instructions), and to direct (traffic signs).

Children come to school with varied experiential and cultural backgrounds, which are derived from "natural" learning of the world around them. The

classroom should continue to foster and support a stimulating natural learning environment (Butler, 1987; Department of Education, 1985; Holdaway, 1979, 1980). It would be free of competition (Holdaway, 1980), encouraging risk taking (Goodman, 1986; Routman, 1988), an ideal place to read, write, listen, and speak, with nothing to cause children to hate the written word (Holdaway, 1980).

From this information a revised definition is made. A literate classroom environment immerses a student in a rich, stimulating, interactive, and purposeful print and language environment. It is designed to provide for: (1) the success in reading, writing, listening, and speaking and (2) the needs of individuals responsible for their own learning in a natural, non-competitive, non-threatening, risk taking setting.

Suggestions for Teachers

The remainder of this article deals with (1) the arrangement of the physical environment, (2) the incorporation of literacy activities, and (3) the

procedures to meet individual student needs.

1. Arrangement of the Physical Environment

According to Morrow (1989), research indicates that physical design of the classroom affects choices and decisions that children make among activities. There is one area that can be used for total group gatherings, where students and teacher come together to share. It can be used for the shared book experiences or any other activity appropriate for the whole class.

Centers are a good means to accommodate learning in a literate environment. Individual student differences and developmental levels are served. In addition, students can learn from each other.

Manipulative and activity-oriented materials pertinent to the content area or particular activity, along with general supplies and resources are available. The area is defined through the use of furniture and shelves to house the materials (Loughlin & Martin, 1987). Each is organized and labeled so that the students can find and return materials easily.

Goodman (1986) encourages having the students make labels for centers and charts with rules, jobs, and attendance. Written directions are available. Open-ended bulletin boards in each center would be an asset.

In planning the centers, it is important for the teacher to keep in mind the child's eye level and what is seen from that point of view. Materials need to be dispersed throughout the environment in boxes, trays, and baskets that are attractive, but not so much so that the box, tray, or basket is the child's focus (Loughlin, 1977).

Each center has in common: (1) content books, literature, manipulatives, pertinent functional print and activities from daily-life-in-the-world; (2) readily available general supplies, instruments, and materials for writing; (3) functional print giving directions; and (4) displays of print to include students' writing and art.

Other ways to surround the students in print is to display their written work and that of others on the walls. Exhibit innovations, reproductions, songs,

rhymes, word lists, and notices (Education Department of Victoria, 1985). Appropriate posters, monthly schedule of activities, lunch menus, student accomplishment charts, bulletin boards, and written notices on the chalkboard are a few examples (Rhodes and Dudley-Marling, 1988).

2. Incorporation of Literacy Activities

This next section includes descriptions and activities which support literacy learning. These nine important items are: reading to children, shared reading, sustained silent reading, guided and individualized reading, language experience, modeled writing, children's writing, sharing, and themes. Each one, with the exception of modeled writing, is recommended by Becoming A Nation of Readers, (Anderson et al., 1985).

First, reading quality literature of various genres to children is one of the best ways to interest them in reading books and affects their writing (Butler, 1987; Graves & Stuart, 1985; Rhodes & Dudley-Marling, 1988). The children learn to listen and

become familiar with story structure, language, ideas, and vocabulary (Department of Education, 1985). Carver (1986) says they begin to realize that print communicates. The teacher modeling good reading is an important factor (Butler, 1987).

The shared book experience is second. It is based on bedtime story tradition, teacher and students sit close together. By using an enlarged text of good literature for reading 15-30 minutes as a class, students see a book and the process of handling it. During re-readings, students participate in choral reading (Butler, 1987). An overhead projector can be used to make enlarged texts. Techniques for covering text on the overhead can be used for predictions (Holdaway, 1979). Students participate in the making of innovations (a story which is changed) and reproductions of the stories read.

Sustained Silent Reading (SSR) is next. This is reading by the teacher and students of books or magazines of their choice for a period of up to 30 minutes. Once again, the modeling of the teacher, a

significant person in the student's life, is extremely important (Butler, 1987). This may be the only time children have the opportunity to read quietly in a busy, noisy world. Reading easy material is one of the best ways to make independent readers (Department of Education, 1985).

Fourth, guided reading is used with a group of 8-10 children who read the same picture book or novel. In the beginning small sections of text are read followed by discussion and strategies for predictions (Department of Education, 1985). Later, when independent readers, they come together in a group reading conference to discuss what was read. The teacher needs to give demonstrations of how to ask questions, think, react to other people, and understand the author (Butler, 1987).

Fifth, language experience is based on an experience the children have. Through talking about it with an interested adult, the child comes to make sense of it (Department of Education, 1985). The event is recorded and then put into a written format that is

readable by the child (Butler, 1987). When it is possible, try to connect actual experiences to books read (Carver, 1986).

Sixth, modeled writing by the teacher allows the students to see and hear the processes that the writer goes through. It can take place while the teacher and students are working on a project together (Butler, 1987). Through the writing of notes and communications to and from students the teacher can set the example for students. (Loughlin & Martin, 1987).

Student writing, seventh, follows naturally with reading. It involves the processes of reading, talking, and thinking (Butler, 1987; Department of Education, 1985; Graves & Stuart, 1985). During the writing process the student constructs meaning and reads. In the revision step, listening is a most crucial factor. The listener gives valuable feedback. Publication of final draft is important.

Eighth, sharing opportunities should be available to the children in all of the activities except the

Sustained Silent Reading. These occasions allow for peer feedback.

Last, content area reading and writing encompasses all of the above (Butler, 1987). Since they are intertwined and support each other, themes can be used for structure. Themes facilitate the meaning of functional reading and writing. In addition, trade books can assist in pulling a topic or theme together. They are especially useful as they are more up-to-date and can match the student's interest and background knowledge (Rhodes & Dudley-Marling, 1988).

3. Procedures to Meet Individual Student Needs

Because students are individuals and have different learning styles and needs, the literate classroom environment is varied in settings and activities ranging from individual to small and whole groups allowing the child to be independent. There are opportunities to take risks and make decisions in a structured, safe framework.

Children are encouraged to use written and oral language with as much independence as possible. They

are allowed to try out and experiment in a secure, non-competitive situation where they feel valued and respected (Routman, 1988). Oral language is encouraged through group work, discussions, retelling of stories, and structured sharing time (Taylor, Blum, and Logsdon, 1986).

Classroom procedures and routines provide structure and predictability in print for children (Taylor et al., 1986). In addition, opportunity should be built in to make choices and decisions available to students, what they will read and write, when they can talk, and activities in which to take part (Routman, 1988). Graves (1975) concluded that in an informal environment, where students are given greater choice, they will write more and longer than when specific assignments are made. Moreover, they do not need motivation and supervision to write.

Implications for Classroom Teachers

Several general implications for the classroom teacher can be made from the review of research. Just as a good chef takes a pan and combines the individual

ingredients to make a superb sauce, so does the teacher uniquely combine these implications for a literate classroom environment.

- Content books, literature, manipulatives, general materials and instruments for writing, and pertinent functional print as well as activities from daily-life-in-the-world are used in the context of a natural, language-rich environment.

- A variety of genres and functional print is used in reading and writing by, for, and to the students and teacher in an integrated manner.

- Print, to include a lot of the child's work, is displayed.

- Experiences and opportunities for student interaction and decision making are provided in a structured, safe framework.

- Caring and positive responding to the children's needs and actions are used.

As the sauce is consumed and processed in the body to become a part of the person, so does this environment affect and change the student. It could

well mean the facilitating of lifelong readers and writers, a more literate society.

References

- Anderson, R. C., Hiebert, E. H., Scott, J. A., & Wilkinson, A. G. (1985). Becoming a nation of readers. Washington, D.C.: National Institute of Education.
- Butler, A. (1987). The elements of the whole language program. Crystal Lake, IL: Rigby.
- Carver, N. K. (1986). Reading readiness: Aspects overlooked in structured readiness programs and workbooks. Childhood Education, 62, 256-259.
- Holdaway, D. (1979). The foundations of literacy. New York: Ashton Scholastic.
- Holdaway, D. (1980). Independence in reading. Gosford: Scholastic.
- Department of Education, New Zealand. (1985). Reading in junior classes. Wellington: Author.
- Education Department of Victoria. (1985). Reading on. Victoria: Author.
- G. & C. Merriam Co. (1961). Webster's new collegiate dictionary. Cambridge: Riverside Press.

- Goodman, K. (1986). What's whole in whole language?.
Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Graves, D. H. (1975). An examination of the writing
processes of seven year old children. Research in
the Teaching of English, 9, 227-241.
- Graves, D. & Stuart, V. (1985). Write from the start.
New York: Dutton.
- Loughlin, C. E. (1977). Understanding the learning
environment. The Elementary School, 78, 125-131.
- Loughlin, C. E. & Martin, M. D. (1987). Supporting
literacy: Developing effective learning
environments. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Morrow, L. M. (1989). Literacy development in the
early years. New Jersey: Prentice Hall.
- Rhodes, L. K. & Dudley-Marling, C. (1988). Readers
and writers with a difference. Portsmouth, NH:
Heinemann.
- Routman, R. (1988). Transitions. Portsmouth, NH:
Heinemann.
- Taylor, N. E., Blum, I. H., & Logsdon, D. M. (1986).
The development of written language awareness:

Environmental aspects and program characteristics.

Reading Research Quarterly, 21, 132-49.

Tempe School District #3. (1988). Literate
Environment. Tempe, AZ: Author.